

Bringing Knowledge to Life in Macomb County

Summer 2003

Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Extension offices in counties throughout the state link the research of the state's land grant university, MSU, with the issues of concern in local communities. Extension provides information and offers educational programs in agriculture and natural resources, youth and families, community and economic development. Local citizens serving on the county Extension council regularly help select current focus areas for programming.



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MSU Extension is an educational organization funded jointly by the Board of Commissioners, the State of Michigan through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.

Focus Areas for Extension Programming in

Building Healthy Families	Helping Youth Succeed
Building Healthy Communities	Healthy Economic Development
Healthy Environment	

Mentoring Saves Dollars and Makes Sense

"It's not all the time that you get to see someone make such dramatic improvements and know that you are a part of it." -Youth Mentor

"I know she [the mentor] will be there for me whenever I need her, even if it's a year down the road." -Youth

Between October 2001 and September 2002, 92 Macomb County youth received an average of 12 hours per month of face-to-face contact with their mentor in MSU Extension's 4-H Youth Mentor Program.

Of these 92 youth, 85 (92 percent) were successful at maintaining home placement while working with a mentor – as opposed to entering residential treatment. *This translates to potential savings of \$4,653,750 for taxpayers* (based on annual cost of \$54,750 to maintain one youth in Youth Home).

As part of the experience, mentors and youth participate in a variety of activities, from baking cookies to helping with homework to sharing problems and successes and attending monthly Life Skills Training (LST) sessions. *LST sessions are designed to teach youth practical, everyday living skills, such as conflict resolution, problem-solving, personal hygiene, self-esteem and substance abuse awareness.*

For over 12 years, MSUE has partnered with the Family Independence Agency and Macomb County Juvenile Court/Family Division to provide mentoring services and Life Skills Training for hundreds of Macomb County youth. The goal is to match qualified adult volunteers with youth in need of guidance, support and positive direction and help youth avoid becoming more deeply involved in the Court or Social Service systems—more costly levels of care and intervention.

Contact: Jan Gwozdz

Great Lakes Program Promotes Stewardship

The Great Lakes Education Program (GLEP) introduces fourth graders to their role in protecting freshwater resources and the unique features of the Great Lakes. Students explore physical, chemical and biological dimensions of the Clinton River and Lake St. Clair through hands-on activities both inside the classroom and during a three-hour boat cruise.

In the 2002-03 school year, 2137 students from 83 classes representing 14 county and four out-of-county districts participated in GLEP. Student surveys (conducted May 14 through June 13, 2003) indicated that approximately 60 percent of GLEP participants had never been on the Clinton River and 40 percent had never been on Lake St. Clair. Prior to GLEP, ten percent of participants had never been on a boat.

Following the GLEP cruise, students also have the option to take part in a poster contest reflecting what they learned. Students consistently demonstrated:

- Increased awareness of pollution in the Clinton River—where pollution originates and prevention methods
- Increased knowledge of how plankton, dissolved oxygen, invasive species and pH levels affect the food chain and water condition

Contest winners Kristin Murray (Ms. Ferrario's class) and Jenny Lezell (Ms. Wrubel's class), both from Carkenord Elementary, were awarded gift certificates for their winning posters.

Nine years after participating in GLEP, a college student working at MSUE for the summer recalled his GLEP experience, including plankton sampling, marine knot tying, map reading and water clarity and temperature testing. He still remembers learning about the threat of zebra mussels and pollution, "the Clinton River was very dirty. I remember thinking about how pollution affected the plants and animals, like the blue heron."

Contact: Terry Gibb

Finding Alternatives to Anger

MSUE began offering *Alternatives to Anger* in November 2002. Since then, seven classes have been held, with over 160 participants. Follow-up evaluations were sent to participants from the first four classes. Responses indicated dramatic behavioral changes.

- **Before** attending *Alternatives to Anger*, 82 percent of participants *sometimes* or *never* recognized their beginning signs of anger and found ways to calm down.
After, 76 percent exhibited this behavior *frequently*.
- **Before** attending, 88 percent were *sometimes* or *never* able to walk away from a situation and return later to handle it in a calm manner.
After, 82 percent were able to do so *confidently*.

Other significant behavior changes included gaining the ability to see another person's point of view and modeling calm conflict resolution strategies with children or a spouse/partner. These changes not only affect class participants, but their families, co-workers and community.

Comments from participants included:

- "Before the class, I didn't *think* about when I get angry. Now I *think...before I react!* I have discovered that most of the time it's not worth it to get angry."
- "Instead of arguing and lecturing, now I ask questions to see how the other person feels."

Alternatives to Anger was formed in response to requests from parents attending parenting classes, county committees and numerous telephone calls from citizens. The four-session class focuses on recognizing the source of our anger, managing anger, not taking others' anger personally and resolving situations triggered by miscommunication. Attendees are from every income and education level. Some participants are court ordered to attend, while others acknowledged the need themselves.

Contact: Su Porter